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QUALITY OF WORK-LIFE OF PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE WORKERS (CHALLENGES AND SATISFACTORY FACTORS)

NUZHATH KHATOON

Assistant Professor Padala Rama Reddi College of Commerce & Management

(Affiliated to Osmania University), Hyderabad, India

ABSTRACT

The Professional knowledge worker is often employed in a knowledge intensive organization whose primary concern is intellectual work [Alvesson 2001]. Professional knowledge workers always work in organizations that recognize the value of knowledge and have processes and technology that support and leverage the creation and application of it. Most of the knowledge workers work in IT industry and these workers are intrinsically motivated and perceived their jobs as important and worthy for themselves as well as for the IT industry. The present study is based on the IT Team leaders. The sample size is 30 IT professionals. The objectives of the study are to find out the challenges of these workers in dynamic environment and factors of satisfaction with the quality of work life. Due to change in technology the challenges are fast and efficient, hence they require cognitive learning. The study shows that much of the knowledge workers achieve the satisfaction with growth opportunity and involvement in decision making.

KEYWORDS: Cognitive Learning, Professional Knowledge Worker, IT Industry

INTRODUCTION

The term knowledge worker seems to have become common after 1973 when [Peter Drucker1973] first presented it. [Thomas H Davenport 2005] defined it as "Knowledge workers have high degree of proficiency, education or understanding and the fundamental purpose of their job involves the creation, allocation or application of knowledge". Knowledge workers endeavor to establish the appropriate knowledge from various sources such as others people, through literature and through knowledge database. Among these knowledge workers those with high and good knowledge can create the innovation which necessary for the growth of the business. Knowledge workers are competent, specialized in their field, well informed and aware of their values and role [Morawski 2005] Due to globalization, expansion of market and change in information technology business and exchange of information being conducted through internet, there has been distinctive demand for a workforce who is capable of performing such task which requires fast and frequent learning and expansion of knowledge.

A knowledge organization's future lies in designing new and revolutionary product and services, devising innovative, efficient transformation and maintenance processes and establishing a unique means of getting these product and services to markets and customers.

Review of Literature

The Professional knowledge worker is often employed in a knowledge intensive organization whose primary concern is intellectual work [Alvesson 2001]. These knowledge intensive organizations are at the heart of the knowledge economy, a rapidly developing part of the business environment[Kim & Mauborgne 1999].Professional knowledge work is of increasing concern to researchers whose interest in knowledge work and sharing knowledge in the 21st century

organization encompasses knowledge work itself [Cross & Cumming 2004, Hackett 2000, Morris 2004]. The unique competence of knowledge intensive companies is thus individuated, inhabitant in the people on whom the organization depends for transformational processes for product and service outputs. The knowledge carried by the knowledge workers becomes a real and controlling resource, perhaps a vital factor of production [Charles & Hiltrop 1995]

Professional knowledge workers always work in organizations that recognize the value of knowledge and have processes and technology that support and leverage the creation and application of it. The most valuable capital that companies possess today is precisely intangible rather than financial [Karl, Eric Sveiby, 1997]. Knowledge is both the tool and the raw material, and the transformation is a very special kind of product. Professional workers enrich human knowledge both as innovators and as creators, they implement it into actions and they share it with others as experts or advisers. The end product which they produce judgments, interpretation, theories, result, conclusions, advice, arguments for and against, and so on [Cuvillies,1974].

Table 1: Comparison of Knowledge Work and Traditional Work

	Knowledge Work	Traditional Work
Employee Career Formation	External to the organization through years of education and socialization	Internal to the organization through training, development, rules and prescriptive career schemes
Employee's loyalty	To professions, networks and peers	To the organization and its career systems
Skill/knowledge sets	Specialized and deep, but often with diffuse peripheral focuses	Narrow and often Functional
Locus of work	In groups and projects	Around individuals
Focus of work	Customers, problems, issues	Tasks, objectives, performance
Skill obsolescence	Rapid	Gradual
Activity/feedback cycles	Lengthy from a business perspective	Primary and of an immediate nature
Performance measures	Process effectiveness Potentially great, but often erratic	Task deliverables Little (as planned), but regular and dependable
Impact on company success	A few major contributions of strategic and long-term importance	Many small contributions that support the master plan

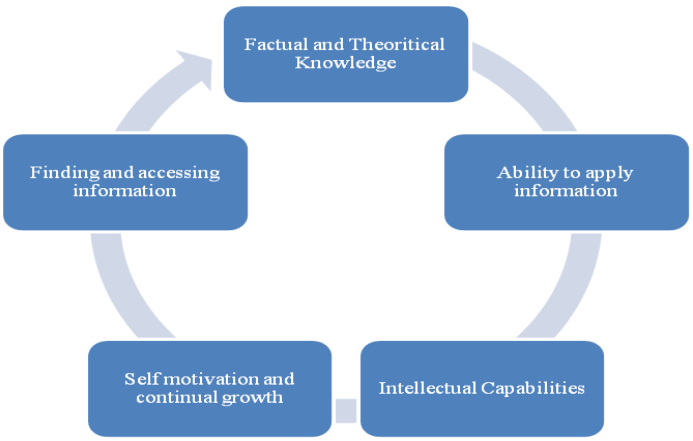
Source: Charles D & J.M Hiltrop(1995)

Professional knowledge workers have been referred to as symbolic analytic workers [Blackler 1995] or gold collar workers [Kelley 1985, Zuboff 1988] who, on the whole are highly paid, high status employees [Reich 1991] and tend to work exceptionally long hours [Deetz 1995] with commitment related more to the nature of work (consulting to a client, writing software code or solving a problems) rather than to organization. They have a strong sense of intrinsic motivation and are mostly interested in challenging work which requires consideration creativity and initiation [Alvesson 2000]. In 1999 Peter Drucker postulated that the most urgent management issue for the 21st century is to make the knowledge workers more productive.

The basic characteristics that are found in professional knowledge workers are:

- Possessing factual and theoretical knowledge.(education)
- Finding and accessing information (updating their professional skills)
- Ability to apply information (problem solving skills)
- Motivation and continual growth, in term of mastery of information and skill development
- Intellectual capabilities (specialized information/unique skills)

Table 2: Diagram Showing the Characteristics' of Professional Knowledge Workers



It is important to recognize that the professional knowledge workers apply their specialized or technical scientific expertise, to high value added problem solving solution process. [Scarbrough 1999] asserts that knowledge workers are defined primarily by the work that they do, which is relatively unstructured and organizationally contingent and which reflects the changing demands of organization more than occupationally defined norms and practices.

In many employment situations the management of the professional knowledge workers is loosely structured with field project teams, rotation of leadership position and low degree of monitoring and control being present [Alvesson 1995]. This often fits with employee needs for autonomy and self- directed development [Morris 2000]. Project based work has become the dominant form of organizing professional knowledge workers [Lam 2005, 2007].

Knowledge workers could perform much better if we only knew how to manage them [Allan Alter 2005] Thomas said that "Knowledge workers don't like any one to direct them. They enjoy more freedom than other workers. Much of their work is invisible and hard to measure, and their skills are hard to replace". Knowledge workers are the key source of the success of any organization and in high demand for future". New product, service, new approach to market, and new business model everything come from the minds of the knowledge workers. Many knowledge workers tend to prefer flexible workplace and flat hierarchies and demand workplace solutions that support greater mobility and work life balance. Many professional knowledge workers have high emotional stability, independence of mind and creativity [Sveiby 1992]. They possess the capabilities of managing and organizing their life at the professional as well as personal level. They enjoy working with different sorts of people and their main task is to lead activities/projects and help their team to complete their tasks.

Knowledge workers establish their own method of completing work, which usually comprises ill-defined, complex task; this is one of the primary issues that lead to complexities in knowledge work and the knowledge intensive organization. The ambiguity inherent in knowledge work can make managing knowledge workers more difficult and introduces a new dimension to work and how employees and managers can approach it [Alvesson 2001]. Knowledge workers posses high degree of expertise, education or experience and the main purpose of their job involves the creation, innovation, distribution or application of knowledge [Devenport 2005]

Most of the knowledge based workers work in IT industry and these workers are intrinsically motivated and perceived their jobs as important and worthy for themselves as well as for the IT industry. Innovation is the main aspect of the IT industry, which requires employees with high creativity and superior performance [Spender, 1996]. The pace of technological changes innovative responses to the market are the hallmark of the IT industry. Continuous change in technology, software, search for new innovative product and services, high level learning's are the requirements of IT.

The main knowledge requires for these workers are drafting knowledge team, deciding on customer requirements, identifying problems and ensuring successful value added result. The knowledge workers expected to posses psychological, technical and business skills, through these skills only they can create new product and services.

Based on the industry requirement IT professional workers has to go on improvising their skills for higher positions, new projects, new areas of research etc.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the challenges faced by the professional knowledge workers
- To analyze the variables of satisfaction for the professional knowledge workers.
- To find out the facilities provided by the company for the better quality of work life for the professional knowledge workers

METHODOLOGY

The research design chosen for the study is descriptive in nature. The sample size taken for conducting the research is 30 IT professionals who are working in different company, as a team leader of the projects. The respondents were selected by using convenient sampling technique. The study attempt to describe the various factors related to the quality of work life and growth opportunity of the professional knowledge workers in the field of information technology (Software engineers)**.** The study has a standard questionnaire as a primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire consists of 2 sections

- Quality of work life-deals with safety and healthy working environment, Job flexibility and satisfaction, career development and opportunity, management support and social integration.
- Performance management- challenges of latest technology, deals with appraisal, feedback, recognition, rewards, involvement in decision making.

INTERPRETATIONS

Challenges Faced by the Professional Knowledge Workers in IT Industry

The working atmosphere is dynamic and since it is heavily exaggerated by the development of information technology, it is continuously growing. This set up necessitate on the knowledge workers to be flexible and willing to adapt to the new situation. Professional knowledge workers have to update their knowledge every now and then to cope up with the change in technology as well as change in the customer requirements.

The previous philosophies of a divided lifetime-education followed by work are no longer acceptable. Professional activity has become so knowledge-intensive and fluid in content that knowledge has become a central and inseparable part of professional activities. In the technological era learning is to be considered as a new form of labor (ERT, 1997; Cochinaux & de Woot, 1995). Professional knowledge work can no longer simply continue from a fixed educational background, rather education must be efficiently incorporated as part of work activities fostering growth and exploration. Similarly, knowledge workers require educational tools and environments to learn and create, (Milrad, 1999).

Based on the research work the following are the challenges faced by the knowledge workers

- Refractive skills, where they have to understand the complexity of the different variables in the software(understanding authentic problems)

- Generating opportunities for the expansion of business and enhancing of overlapping of the entities in software (learning on demand of market)
- Generating abstract ideas through the knowledge, past experience and cognitive thinking (integration of working and learning)
- Disseminating skills where they spread their thought to the targeted customers effective and efficient way (information contextualized to the task)

Satisfactory Factors of Professional Knowledge Workers (Hypothesis Testing)

- H_o There is no relationship between satisfaction and involvement in decision making

  H_a There is a relationship between satisfaction and involvement in decision making

Table 3: Correlation between Satisfaction and Involvement in Decision Making

Correlations			
		Satisfaction With the Job	**Involving Employees in Decision Making**
Satisfaction with the job	Pearson Correlation	1	.431*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017
	N	30	30
Involving employees in decision making	Pearson Correlation	.431*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	
	N	30	30
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

The above table states that the r = 0.431 there is a positive correlation between the satisfaction levels of the job with the involvement of the employees in decision making at 5% level of significance. Thus we reject the null hypothesis. These knowledge workers feel satisfied if they are involve in the decision making process because they feel valuable and worthy in the organization.

- H_o There is no significant relation between satisfaction and growth opportunity

  H_a There is a significant relation between satisfaction and growth opportunity

Table 4: Correlation between Satisfaction and Growth Opportunity

Correlations			
		Satisfaction with the Job	**Opportunity for Growth**
Satisfaction with the Job	Pearson Correlation	1	.477**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008
	N	30	30
Opportunity for growth	Pearson Correlation	.477**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	
	N	30	30
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The above table states r = 0.477 which shows that there is a positive correlation between the satisfaction levels of the job with the growth opportunity at 5% level of significance. Thus we reject the null hypothesis

Table 5: ANOVA Test for the Significance of Satisfaction with Growth and Involvement in Decision Making

ANOVA[c]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	1.836	1	1.836	9.581	.008[a]
	Residual	5.364	28	.192		
	Total	7.200	29			
2	Regression	4.036	2	2.018	17.224	.000[b]
	Residual	3.164	27	.117		
	Total	7.200	29			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Growth opportunity						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Involving employees in decision making						
c. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction with the job						

Organizational Facilities given for the Professional Knowledge Workers for the Quality of Work Life

Understandable and measurable results (Training and Job description)

Providing practical and immediate feedback (motivational incentives)

High involvement in decision making process (clarity of the goal)

Formation of informal talent network

Freedom of professional membership

Linking performance with the growth opportunity (promotions with pay hike)

Sharing and transferring of knowledge on a common platform to facilitate learning (Discussion, Quality circles, Meeting(Formal or informal))

CONCLUSIONS

In order to improve the productivity and creativity in the professional knowledge workers organization has to provide better quality of work life, especially to the IT professional workers, developing environments that promote sharing of information and enhancing educational opportunities, accuracy of work, by providing clear job description. Many of the professional knowledge workers seems to be satisfied with two factors like growth opportunity and involvement in decision making process and other factors like salary, work environment, safety are taken as second level of satisfaction. To survive in the IT industry they have to face many challenges compare to the other professional workers such as they have to go on updating the knowledge through frequent training program, or online learning method. They have to enhance their cognitive skills so that they can provide better solutions to the customer and market requirement.

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